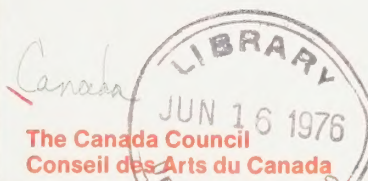


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Government
Publication



The Canada Council
and the Arts
in Saskatchewan

Notes for a speech to the
SaskARTchewan Conference,
Saskatoon,
May 1, 1976

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Statements and speeches

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The Canada Council and the Arts in Saskatchewan

Anyone who works for a national organization is continually challenged and stimulated by the unlimited variety of lifestyles and values, of problems and opportunities, to be found within the borders of this diversified country. From many points of view the Province of Saskatchewan is like no other. Some of the factors which set the Province apart have a profound impact on the arts. Artistic tastes and traditions may need several generations to take root, yet the Province's history barely spans a single lifetime. Some forms of artistic expression require a considerable concentration of population, yet a majority of the people of Saskatchewan live in the country or in small towns. Despite these apparent disadvantages the arts have been accorded an honoured place in Saskatchewan life, and the Province has produced a remarkable number of outstanding artists of national and international reputation. It is worth remembering that it was Saskatchewan which set up the first publicly funded arts board in Canada (or in North America); and this was done a full ten years before a procrastinating federal government got around to establishing the Canada Council.

In the 70's there has been a noticeable expansion of artistic activity in this Province; the Globe has moved into a handsome new theatre and extended its touring; two professional theatre companies have established themselves in Saskatoon; the two symphony orchestras in the Province have turned professional and enlarged their seasons; there are new dance companies and art galleries in Saskatoon and Regina; and all this growth has been reflected in a rapid increase in Canada Council grants over the last three years.

In this situation of development and change it is timely to bring together the arts community of the Province, to review the state of the arts, and to make plans for the future. In making your plans you will no doubt wish to take into account federal funding programs, including those of the Canada Council. The Council itself has been in a period of development and change. It must continually adjust its programs to the changing needs and capabilities of artists in all parts of the country. This Conference provides an opportunity not only to describe what the Council has been doing in the past, but to hear from the Saskatchewan arts community what needs to be done in the future.

I have been asked to speak on "federal government support of the arts". To cover the whole range of federal funding would require one speech about broadcasting, another about film making,

a third about museums, a fourth about the Local Initiatives Program and so on. In these remarks I shall be concentrating on the Canada Council's programs which reflect general federal government policies and which may directly affect many of the participants at this conference.

This year the federal government will spend about \$600 million on the arts (including broadcasting). Of this, 10%, or \$60 million, will be paid to the Canada Council. The Council's arts budget is \$36 million, or less than half a cent a day for each Canadian. By comparison, a single Orion patrol airplane will cost us about \$60 million and the government is planning to buy 18 of them, if it can scrape up the down payment.

When the Council was founded in 1957, its annual budget for the arts was less than \$2 million. With such limited resources it was necessary to decide which aspects of the arts it could afford to support. A dilemma which faces every arts funding agency is whether to concentrate on artistic excellence, on providing a decent living for a relatively small number of outstanding artists, or whether to invest in activities which broaden the base of artistic life by encouraging more people to participate, both as artists and as audiences. One of my predecessors, Peter Dwyer, used to ask, "Should we water the flower or the field?" Given the acute shortage of water, the Council decided to sprinkle the flowers. It should be

remembered that the professional Canadian artist in those days was a far rarer and even more fragile flower than he is today. To give just one example, in the first year the Council could find only four professional theatre companies, all of them in Quebec and Ontario, which deserved support; twenty years later we fund over one hundred companies from Newfoundland to Vancouver Island.

In its first years the Council set up its program of awards to individual artists and started to provide annual operating grants to a relatively small number of arts organizations of recognized excellence. Throughout the sixties the Council's budget continued to increase, as did the number and quality of professional arts organizations receiving annual grants. But the Council's principal concern was to recognize and sustain proven excellence; we were still watering those flowers.

In the seventies, with the additional resources that have been made available by the federal government, the Council has accepted a wider responsibility. The Honourable Gérard Pelletier, when he was Secretary of State, used the phrase "democratization and decentralization" to describe his policy. For the Council this has meant several new directions in our programs. Our objectives have been to enlarge the audiences for our artists and to achieve a better distribution of arts activities across the country.

Touring Office. One of our most important new programs is the Touring Office which helps to arrange and to subsidize extended tours by our best performing artists. Grants have recently been made to Globe Theatre and Persephone Theatre. The Touring Office sees its role as going beyond providing grants for individual tours. It is trying to build up a network of sponsors in large and small communities across the country. These sponsors will enlarge the opportunities available to our artists and provide access to their performances to previously unreached audiences. The Touring Office publishes an annual directory which lists touring attractions, facilities and sponsors. It also organizes workshops for sponsors. One of the first and most productive was held in Swift Current in the fall of 1974. At this meeting the Organization of Saskatchewan Arts Councils agreed to jointly sponsor a series of performing arts events during the 1975-76 season. The final and most ambitious project was a tour of eight communities by the great Canadian contralto Maureen Forrester. I am told that she played to enthusiastic sold-out houses at all her concerts. This is an excellent example of what can be achieved by the right combination of artistic talent, public funding and community support.

Public readings. Another popular method of enlarging the audience for our artists has been the public readings program. Over the past three years we have sent hundreds of poets, novelists and short story writers into all regions of the country to read from their works in universities, libraries, arts centres and, occasionally, taverns. The public's thirst for this form of spiritual refreshment

shows no sign of being quenched. Libraries in Regina, Saskatoon and Moose Jaw have taken advantage of this program.

Book kits. The Council has also been enlarging the audience for Canadian writers by sending kits of two hundred books, in English, French, or both languages, to public libraries which otherwise could not afford to acquire them. This year we sent kits to Coronach, Le Roy, Debden and Cut Knife.

Book promotion and distribution. Last year, with special funds provided by the federal government, the Council began a new program to improve the promotion and distribution of Canadian books and magazines. Our committee of advisers held its first out-of-town meeting in Saskatoon, in order to familiarize the members with the problems of book distribution in this region. One result of this meeting has been a seed-money grant to the President of the Saskatchewan Writers Guild to appoint a literary arts coordinator. To our knowledge this is the first project of its kind in Canada.

Artists-in-residence. In the past few years the Council has gradually been building up its network of artists-in-residence. These residencies have proved to be of mutual benefit to the artist and his community and we would like to expand the number of communities served by them. Next week we shall be announcing a new program which will enable smaller centres to benefit from the services and presence of a highly skilled professional musician, and I am sure it will be of interest to many communities in Saskatchewan.

Choirs. While speaking of music I should also mention our grants to provide professional assistance to choirs. This is an effective way of bringing professional musicians into contact with amateur performers and their audiences. Among those who have received such grants are the Regina Philharmonic Choir and the Saskatoon Choral Society.

Explorations. A final example of a Council program designed to enlarge the boundaries of arts activities is "Explorations". This program, which has a budget of \$1.3 million this year, offers grants to any project in the arts, or in the humanities and social sciences, which would not be eligible under some other Council program. Applicants may be amateurs or professionals, young or old, urban or rural, and their projects may take familiar forms or be the first of their kind. It is the Council's hope and intention that this program should be particularly useful in communities or regions where professional artistic activity is less developed. Our records show that 31% of Explorations grant holders live in rural areas, which is much higher than the percentage of Canadians who do.

All Explorations applications are judged by regional juries which are composed of residents of the region and which meet in different regional centres. There are two Saskatchewan residents on the Prairie Region jury and it has met in Saskatoon and Regina.

Because many of the projects funded by Explorations are highly original - that is a polite way of saying they often sound "kooky" - the program has been constantly assailed by members of Parliament, editorial writers and ordinary taxpayers. Council believes that this criticism, much of it based on lack of information about the projects, is the price of remaining open to new ideas, to fresh points of view and to regional and community values.

Explorations grants have made it possible to record an album of Saskatchewan songs, to write a book about steamboats on the Prairies, and to explore the heritage of Northern Saskatchewan settlements - three projects of particular value to this region.

I have been speaking of Council's recently initiated attempts to enlarge the audience for the arts and to improve the distribution of arts activities. There is another vast and challenging area of the arts with which the Council has only begun to grapple, and that is the provision of adequate training and exposure for the artists and audiences of tomorrow. A large part of this job should probably be carried out within the regular educational system. This remains a provincial responsibility. But there are aspects of an adequate system of arts training and exposure which go beyond the educational system and beyond the resources of individual provinces. In these areas a federally-funded body like the Council should be able to provide some leadership and some financial support.

So far the Council's only substantial contribution to professional arts training has been through its support of the National Theatre School of Canada and the National Ballet School. Although these institutions may seem a long way from Saskatoon, they do have an impact on this Province, as on all others. Each year both schools hold auditions in Saskatchewan and the best candidates have an opportunity to join their most talented contemporaries for training of a calibre which can only be provided by an institution which is national in scope. At the moment there are students from Saskatchewan at both schools. In addition the National Ballet School holds annual training sessions for ballet teachers from every province and sends its own teachers to give workshops in other parts of the country.

In view of present and future growth in the demand for trained professional artists, all these activities should be intensified and carried out at more than one centre. The Council cannot claim to have found the answers to the many questions which can be raised about this subject in a country as spread out and diverse as Canada. At the moment we are planning or conducting studies of music and theatre training and of arts in education. I expect this aspect of the Council's programs to grow in importance in the years ahead.

I hope I have provided enough examples of recent innovations in Council programs to indicate that we have gone far beyond our original function of supporting existing artistic excellence. The Council's primary responsibility still must be to provide the essential support for the best of our artists and arts organizations, without which there would be virtually no professional artistic activity in this country. To return to Peter Dwyer's metaphor: We continue to water the flowers; but we are also sowing some seeds, and we have even begun to till the soil. These new dimensions of Council activity should be of particular interest to a region in which some of the traditional forms of art, and particularly those forms which require large and expensive organizations, have not been feasible.

The virtual absence of large performing arts organizations in Saskatchewan is the main reason for the discrepancy in total Canada Council funds paid to this Province as compared to the national average, which is referred to in the document circulated to delegates to this conference. This is reinforced by another statistic which I take from our records for 1974-75, the last year for which complete results are available. In that year we approved grants to a total of thirty organizations in Saskatchewan and to exactly the same number in the neighbouring Province of Manitoba. But the average grant in Saskatchewan was only a fraction of the average in Manitoba. The difference can be attributed to a cluster of large and long-established institutions

based in Winnipeg. In disciplines other than writing and the visual arts, the absence of such institutions also accounts for the relatively small number of senior arts awards applied for, or awarded to, residents of Saskatchewan. In our most recent list of 45 senior awards the two winners from Saskatchewan were a writer and a sculptor.

The conference document also mentions the low percentage of applications for Council grants which come from Saskatchewan. This is a matter of concern to the Council as it must be to you. There is one explanation of this situation which does not stand up to examination. It is sometimes alleged Canada Council juries are prejudiced against Saskatchewan, or certain regions of the country, so that it is not worthwhile for a candidate from such a region to apply. Let me assure you that our juries are regionally diversified so that there is normally one out of three members who comes from the Western Provinces, that our Arts Panel, which reviews the awards, is drawn from across the country and includes a Saskatchewan artist, and that the Council itself includes a representative from Saskatchewan. Here is another statistic from our 1974-75 results. Among the applicants for arts awards the highest percentage of winners came from Newfoundland and Saskatchewan. That indicates to me that there are some fine young artists in this Province and that our juries were perceptive enough to recognize them.

There is one other statistic in the conference document which is worth considering. In 1973-74, three years ago, the Council provided approximately \$215,800 in grants to Saskatchewan residents. In 1975-76, the year which ended last March 31, complete results would show a total in excess of \$500,000, an increase of over 130% in two years.

I wish I could assure you that this phenomenal rate of increase will continue over the next few years. Unfortunately, as we are all aware, the restraints on government spending and on the Council's budget will make that impossible. In the next two or three years there will probably be little if any real increase in the level of Council support. This means we are entering a period of great difficulty for many artists and arts organizations in this country. While this restriction on immediately available resources should be taken into account in any plans for the arts, I do not believe we should allow it to paralyse us.

Looking around at the variety and vitality of the arts scene in Canada today, I cannot believe that we have reached the limit of our growth. Nor do I think that in the long run the government can be unresponsive to a widespread and deeply felt demand for music, theatre and dance, for writing, painting and the many other forms of artistic expression.

At the moment there are too many people in this country who have not accepted the case for increasing public support of the arts. There are too many people who have never experienced the arts, who have had no chance to enjoy them. The only effective arguments for the arts are the arts themselves.

Artists and the arts funding bodies should use the current period of restraint to devise new ways of reaching much further out into the community. From what I have seen of the artists of Saskatchewan they are particularly conscious of this responsibility. Among them there is a strong tradition of community service, even where it involves some personal sacrifice.

Building on this tradition, I am confident that Saskatchewan artists, working with arts administrators and supported by a growing public, will obtain the necessary resources to make their vital contribution to our society, and thereby to enrich us all.

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